Identity and Adjustment in Transition:

A Mixed-Methods Study of Dual-heritage Young People in London

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Background: Dual-heritage Young People

According to the last Census, only 2.2% of the UK's population have parentage of two or more ethnic/cultural/national background) but is (one of) the fastest-growing ethnic groups in England and Wales (Office of National Statistics, 2011). There has been longstanding debate on dual-heritage identity. Identity pertains to a sense of belonging, is itself a construct in the third tier of Maslow's pyramid of needs and strongly predicts psychological adjustment in adulthood (Neville et al., 2014). Past research has largely focused, using a western binary lens, on `Black' and `White' racial categories, suggesting a state of identity crisis. More recent research, with particularly non-clinical samples, has suggested adaptability and resilience in the face of the specific challenges met by this minority group, which itself, by definition, is highly diverse within a globalised context (LaFramboise, 1993).

Generally speaking, ethnic minority individuals who are able to form strong, positive 'multiple' identities tend to exhibit higher academic achievement, higher self-esteem and better mental health than their minority peers with 'singular' identities (Marks et al., 2011). However, such individuals face a different set of challenges in becoming fully integrated within their multifaceted identities which can be reflected in ethinic identification, intergroup competence and psychological wellbeing (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Most studies have focused on 'mixed race' people, in the US, while the wider range of 'dual-heritage' identities that can often go beyond race, and ensuing adjustment, have received relatively little attention in research and where individuals themselves sometimes may have hesitance in self-identifying as such.

Family socialisation, acculturation, college adjustment, self-esteem and wellbeing are particularly relavant to dual identities and are complex and multifaceted, at times integrating more than two cultures (Lam et al., 2019). Family ethnic socialisation has been shown to play a role in the identity formation of such individuals, with meaning-making at home through customs and celebrations, for example (Shneider, 2012). Negative effects have also been observed being due to factors outside of the home such as marginalization by the ingroup which is a pivotal foundation for self-esteem (Tajfel, 1982). Local context diversity may also mediate these effects, where such individuals may show better adjustment in more diverse contexts. This is particularly critical for those who go through key transitions in life (such as to adulthood), with this added complexity of bicultural adaptation processes.

The challenges of a dual-heritage background mean that there is a need to ascertain the mechanisms underlying the identity formation and ensuing adjustment of these individuals, as an oft-underrepresented and misunderstood group within education settings and other social organisations (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004).

This study focuses on the identity formation and adjustment of dual-heritage and non-dual-heritage young people in further to higher education. In this study, 'Dual-heritage' (DH) refers to those who self-identify as having parents from two or more different ethnic, national or cultural backgrounds.

Research questions*:* Do DH differ to non-DH in identity formation and psychological adjustment? Are young people's identity constructs associated with adjustment?

Mixed-methods: Dual-heritage in East London

A survey and interviews were used to investigate both aspects of individual experiences of bicultural adjustment in dual-heritage youth.

The survey sample was drawn from FE and HE institutions in East London. N=156 (106 female; 47 male) aged 16-35 (M=19.4) years, including 39 self-identified as White, 20 Black, 72 Asian, 21 DH and 4 classified as 'other'. [Participants also split into under/over 18 to observe differences in transition to adulthood]

Measures*:* administered via anonymous online surveying platform Qualtrics

Measure	Source	Specimen items
Self-esteem Scale	Rosenberg (1965)	10-item measure, using a 4-point Likert scale; ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree; e.g., *`On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.'*
College adjustment test	Pennebaker (1990)	19-item measure, using a 7-point Likert scale from `not at all' to `a great deal'; i.e., *`Within the LAST WEEK, to what degree have you*: e.g., *`Missed your friends from school'*
Perceived local context diversity measure	Harter, S. (1983)	8-item self-rated measure, using a 5-point Likert scale (5=full of people of different backgrounds to 1=hardly anyone from a 'non-white' background); e.g., *The immediate neighbourhood around my current home is…*
Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure	Phinney (1992)	15-item measure, using a 4-point Likert scale; e.g., *I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group(s), such as its/their history, traditions, and customs.*
General Ethnic Discrimination Scale	Landrine and Klonoff (1996)	18-item measure using a 1-6 Likert scale measure, from 'never' to 'almost all of the time'; e.g., '*How often have you been treated unfairly by teachers and professors because of your ethnic background?'*
familial ethnic socialization measure	Umaña-Taylor (2001)	12-item measure using a 1-5 Likert scale from 1='not at all' to 5='very much'; e.g., *`My family teaches me about my ethnic/cultural background.'*
Psychological Well-being Scale	Ryff and Keyes (1995)	18-item measure, using a 7-point Likert scale; from strongly agree to strongly disagree; e.g., *'I like most parts of my personality.'*

The Interview Sample: 7 (3 male; 4 female) aged 17-28 years self-identified dual-heritage people came forward through survey advertising and researcher's social networks, which were each interviewed for 27 to 54 minutes.

Interview Schedule (sample questions):

- How do you normally call yourself or prefer to be called? [What other terms have others used for you?]
- If you feel you relate to one parent's culture more, which is that?
  [Why do relate to that culture more? (or both equally)]
- May I ask you about friends and peer groups?
  [Do you think you relate well with people from many other backgrounds?]
  [Do you think it is important to have friendships with others who are also 'mixed' or 'dual'?]
- Could we explore your school life up to college/ university?
  [From as far back as you remember, did you feel fitted well in school? What about now?]
  [Have you ever felt that you may be treated differently because of your background?]

Analysis: between-groups (ethnic, gender, age) differences in the above measures, and between-measures relationships (e.g., between identity and college adjustment) from the survey [tests of differences and associations], and common themes across the interviewees (and within-theme variation) from interviews [thematic analysis]

Results and Recommendations

Did the ethnic groups (esp. dual-heritage) differ in identity and other measures?

	Dual Heritage		Asian		Black		White	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Perceived local diversity	4.54	1.43	4.82	1.08	5.33	0.83	4.32	1.09
Ethnic identity	3.34	0.74	3.28	0.93	3.49	0.85	2.95	0.83
Ethnic discrimination	**2.04***	0.91	1.68	0.77	**2.13***	0.83	1.39	0.46
Familial ethnic socialization	**3.00***	1.14	3.63	0.9	3.78	0.9	**2.91***	0.68
College adjustment	**3.95***	0.79	4.17	0.93	4.53	0.73	4.24	0.68
Self-esteem	2.70	0.26	2.73	0.27	2.91	0.29	2.74	0.18
Psychological Well-being	3.34	0.74	3.28	0.93	3.49	0.85	2.95	0.83

*Where DH (& another group) differs from other groups

How about gender or age (over/under 18) differences (transition to adulthood)?

No gender differences in key measures were observed. The sample overall had an age group effect for ethnic family socialisation (under-18, M=3.70, SD=.87; over-18 M=3.20, SD=1.05). This was substantiated by a positive (if weak) correlation between age and family socialisation (r= -.20) p=.02); as individuals get older, ethnic socialisation from family becomes weaker.

How are ethnic identity formation variations related to adjustment outcomes?

	Perceived Local diversity	Ethnic discrimination	Ethnic family socialization	Ethnic identity strength
College adjustment	**.227****	.063	.098	.106
Self esteem	**.162***	.075	.128	**.201***
Psych. Wellbeing	-.072	.125	.141	**.283****

*p<.05; **p<.01

Higher perceived local diversity, higher college adjustment and self-esteem. Stronger EI, higher self-esteem and wellbeing.

Key Themes about Dual-heritage

Prejudice and Discrimination

- Being fetishized
- Minority stress and effects of prejudice and discrimination
- Deprived of a sense of belonging

`(racism)... It was more like an internal Gripe on someone's external opinion'
`in the 90s, mixed race babies were so like hyper fetishized that everyone wanted to make one, I'll never forget it. Like, in absolutely fabulous'

`Growing up used get Cooley a lot. My mom used to get malato a lot and half-caste.'
`a really smart girl, I in my head in the book, but I don't know if it was because I was half Asian'
`felt like they were different and they felt like I was, sometimes that was overwhelming. If and when you're mixed, you feel like you're just from nowhere'

Cultural learning and exploration

- Cultural meaning making at home
- Cultural meaning making withing friendship groups and culture at large
- Ongoing learning in the process of bicultural adaptation and openness

`I take a lot of pride in both of the cultures now that I'm older, I've learned like the Indian Wisdom and I love the Sri Lankan dancing and costumes'
`I love seeing how far we've come as people, and I don't believe that only one culture can live on its own'

`Barriers

- Geographical and language barriers
- Denied access to community cultural resources

'And I felt like that he (family member) was talking about like our cultures clashing, 'I can't talk with basically anyone in my family.... I just don't know the language'

``they didn't let my older brother and sister do it because I said it would be too hard where we don't speak it at home... I was that kid that couldn't access it at all'

Summary/ Recommendations

DH experiences are diverse and variable. Although they did not show weaker ethnic identification and reported comparable self-esteem and wellbeing as other minorities, they also received less family ethnic socialisation (similar to their white counterparts), yet (similar to their black counterparts) perceived greater discrimination and showed the worst college adjustment. This is important considering the weakening of family socialisation in general as people enter adulthood. DH expressed an array of barriers, including a lack of access to resources for exploring their cultural identities, often sourcing these within the home or close friendship groups. Their denied access or experience of prejudice within their own cultural groups sometimes acts as the catalyst for intergroup friction, even though that also presents them a unique self-concept, based on cultural openness and embracing diversity at large. They continue to learn and make meaning independently and carve out their salient identity or life as the transition progresses. Considering the relevance of diversity and identity for adjustment outcomes, there is a need for:

- *A wider understanding and acceptance of such individuals so that they can gain a stronger sense of belonging in different contexts*
- *Safe spaces opened for discussions to be made for dual-heritage individuals, particularly in education, which other minorities are also able to access with ease and has been shown to be an effective support channel in the formation of strong positive identities*
- *More public education and research focusing on a larger array of dual heritages in the UK as well as in less diverse contexts*

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